

**CITY OF TAKOMA PARK, MARYLAND
WORKSESSION AND BUDGET WORKSESSION
OF THE CITY COUNCIL
(Adopted July 11, 2005)**

Thursday, May 12, 2005

The Council convened at 7:45 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building, 7500 Maple Avenue, Takoma Park, Maryland..

OFFICIALS PRESENT:

Mayor Porter

Councilmember Austin-Lane

Councilmember Elrich

Councilmember Mizeur

Councilmember Seamens

Councilmember Williams

City Manager Matthews

Deputy City Manager Hobbs

Acting City Clerk Carpenter

Public Works Director Lott

Public Works Deputy Director Braithwaite

City Engineer Khalilian

OFFICIALS ABSENT:

Councilmember Barry

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Debra Nelson, 7411 Maple Avenue, testified that she and others have been working with Councilmember Austin-Lane to figure the proper measurement for the speed humps. We're all in agreement that we need 5.5 inch speed humps on Maple. The crosswalk across Maple, at Valley View, is dangerous because it creates a false sense of security for the kids. We would be better off having no crosswalk there at all. I've gone across raised crosswalks in other communities, that make cars stop. This doesn't make people stop but helps them along the way. This is at the most dangerous point, because cars speed up to make the green light. Please reconsider the raised crosswalk.

WORKSESSION

1. Maple Avenue Speed Humps

Mr. Lott described what has occurred with the installation of speed humps on Maple Avenue. Residents are not happy with what has been installed. Councilmember Austin-Lane came out to try to resolve the situation. The contractor, the City Engineer, and Ms. Austin-Lane took a tour of the Cedar Avenue speed humps. On all the Cedar speed humps, you can see marks from where the cars have scraped them. One is 5.5 inches high. When the speed humps are too high, we have to plane them down. On Maple Avenue, we felt we went out on a limb with the 4.5 inch speed hump. The last three speed humps, if removed, will cost \$3,000. We had to cancel an asphalt delivery as a result of this.

Ms. Austin-Lane said she is satisfied that going with the Cedar Avenue speed bump would provide an effective slowing mechanism with minimal scarring. I'm satisfied with putting that in. The idea that there was a certain height came to our attention within the last several weeks. This has been on the residents' minds for a year and a half, but has just come to our attention. We are playing catch up, trying to meet residents' expectations. I encourage the Council to consider these separate and apart from other areas of the city. Maple Avenue is another major road, just like Carroll and Philadelphia. They've achieved a nice residential feel. It is somewhat exceptional because it is a bus route and a cut through.

Mr. Williams said I'm not sure that we have a general agreement of the design purpose behind a speed hump. To my mind, the purpose is not to slow cars almost to a stop, and then have the cars speed up again. It would be helpful at some point to try to come to an understanding, and share that understanding. Maybe 15 mph is appropriate; maybe 20 mph. The general need is to keep traffic at a safe speed. We can't have a five mph speed limit. I thought we had agreement two weeks ago.

I think we need to agree on something, and stick with it. I thought this was delayed because the neighborhood wanted to design it better. My sense was that there was going to be a look at the street as a whole, to improve the safety of the street. Looking at just the speed humps is not enough. We need to look at the whole thing. We had some agreement beforehand.

Mr. Seamens asked Mr. Lott if he saw a compromise position of being able to salvage the work that has been done, and yet come closer to the residents' desires.

Mr. Lott said staff can salvage the work, but the humps that we installed will likely fail within the next few years if we simply build them up. We are concerned about the abruptness of the speed humps. We are concerned about the complaints we will receive from drivers. If we make them exceptionally difficult, we could have the potential of loss of control of the vehicle. The four inch height was designed for a reason.

Mr. Elrich said every one of the half speed humps currently installed on Maple Avenue virtually stopped cars. They are more jarring. You can't do 20 mph on them. I don't feel the need to go to 5.5 inches.

Mr. Lott agreed. If the speed limit is 25 mph, and the objective is to calm the traffic, we have done that. We have put in the standard and raised to 4.5 inches (at the crown, and to where it starts sloping).

Ms. Porter said I advocated strongly for the City to adhere to the agreement we made with the residents. I appreciate Joy's comment; we are playing a bit of catch up. A resident contacted me and offered to retrieve a diagram and take it to Public Works. The half speed humps installed there now are based on the City's good faith attempt to put in what was there before. It was us trying to do the best we could with the information we had. It appears to me now that we don't have good information as to what the speed humps were. I would like to put in a speed hump

which adheres to the agreement that was made before. Joy took some folks around, and the Cedar Avenue speed hump was what they wanted. I'm willing to do this, but I am concerned that we will have a group of people who want a different speed hump.

Ms. Austin-Lane said this is how not to repave a road. We did not have the residents ask for traffic calming. The planners thought it would be a good idea to try traffic calming ideas. It should have come from the residents. Two weeks ago, my understanding was that Public Works was to put in the speed bumps that had been there before. We blessed the drawing that was in front of us. What I saw on Tuesday was somewhat of a redesigned speed bump. The five mph versus 15 or 20 mph. As we were driving Cedar, the driver took the speed humps at about 15 or 20 mph. He didn't go five mph; didn't stop and then proceed. These are not curbs in the middle of the road. These are as close as we can determine to the original ones. As to the issue of whether we will have another group of residents who want something different, I would like you to defer to me on that. I'm not concerned we will hear different stories from different people. There's some idea that instead have a 5.5 inch speed hump, we could have a lower one with a more severe incline. This will delay it more. Since there's been a piece of asphalt cut out, there has to be something put back in. If there is a desire to have a bump with much less of an incline, I am open to that.

In response to questions from Mr. Williams and Ms. Porter, Mr. Lott said if we try to salvage the existing speed hump, it will last a while, but not 15 years. We will talk to the contractor to see if we can salvage some cost. If we try to change the profile, it would look bad and most likely fail. With the template, we mold the hot asphalt.

Mr. Seamens commented that we made a commitment to provide the same function that was there previously. I'm concerned about topping off the existing humps in a manner that won't last. I am puzzled by the measurements of the old humps taken by a resident, and now we are doing something higher.

Ms. Austin-Lane said there was a measurement and a model provided to Public Works, but what was installed is not acceptable.

Mr. Elrich commented that it is less the height than the approach. They're not as jarring. 5.5 inches is too much. I think the issue is the approach. I'd be happy to stay with the 4.5 inches, but with a more severe approach.

Ms. Mizeur said we have to reach a cut off; staff is asking for direction. We had presentations on this, staff did as we instructed, and the residents are still unhappy. We have to make a decision and say that is the decision.

Joan Horn, Maple Avenue, said inches are negotiable. Change the gradual approach up to the hump. Historically we had accidents more than 20 years ago on Maple Avenue. The humps were five miles per hour. The intent was to make traffic almost stop. We said we wanted the same bumps. We want a more abrupt approach.

Council continued to discuss the issue.

Ms. Matthews explained that in light of Council's previous direction, she had authorized staff to proceed with the slightly higher profile. The speed hump that is now desired by the residents (the Cedar Avenue profile) is a pretty significant deviation from what the Council agreed to. Staff has a responsibility to come back to the Council if we are far afield from what was directed.

After further discussion the Council agreed to install the Cedar Avenue profile speed hump, at 4.5 inches. Council expressed their intention that this is to apply only to Maple Avenue. Councilmember Austin-Lane will be the point of contact for staff on this issue.

BREAK

The Council recessed for a scheduled break at 9:11 p.m. and reconvened at 9:25 p.m.

BUDGET WORKSESSION

2. Public Works, Capital Improvement Program, Stormwater Fund, Community Center Fund, and Debt Service

Ms. Matthews provided an overview of the Public Works budget. She highlighted in increases, the majority of which is attributable to personnel costs. Utility costs are budgeted in Public Works. With the completion of the Community Center, there will be more square footage. The budget shows an increase in fuel costs and increased tree maintenance. Ms. Matthews noted the new City Gardens Division, which had formerly been included in the Urban Forest Division. There is no change in the level of service.

Mr. Lott explained the function of the CDA Maintenance Technician. He cleans the right-of-way and the dumpster area. If the CDA does not continue their financial participation, we will go to that area once a week. That person would work in the Right-of-Way Division during other times, working on crack filling, patching, and striping. We are using our own people for this.

Ms. Matthews asked the Council, if the CDA does not make their contribution, does the Council want to fund this position at the same level.

Ms. Austin-Lane said she would defer to Mr. Barry's judgment on this.

Mr. Williams asked the individual removed posters in the right-of-way area only in the CDA area and asked where he should call about this when he sees it in other areas.

Mr. Lott said this is done by the Maintenance Technician only in the CDA area.

Mr. Lott explained the purpose of the \$80,000 salt dome. He indicated that it is needed to store salt without having the residue run off into the stream.

He noted that the Gardens Division is caring for several new gardens and pocket parks. We have been steadily increasing the responsibility of this division.

Ms. Austin-Lane said she is glad to see it separated out. Mike Welsh is an expert. His projects are celebrated. She asked if the temporary workers have been employed long term. Can you tell me what the situation is?

Ms. Matthews said that workers who work 20 hours a week year-round trigger benefits. Mr. Lott described the use of temporary employees. We have four laborers who are full time and supplement them with temporary workers.

Ms. Austin-Lane commented that we should not be using the temporary status to keep from paying benefits.

Mr. Elrich agreed.

Ms. Braithwaite responded to a question raised in an earlier meeting about the blue recycling bins used by Montgomery County. The County has asked their contractor to supply their bins to improve paper recycling. The large, lidded containers hold paper and cardboard. The contractor uses a regular collection vehicle. Implementing a container like this in the city would probably not improve our recycling participation, which is already quite high.

We still keep the ability to separate newspaper from other paper. The corrugated cardboard is problematic because it is large and does not always fit in the truck. We often send out a second truck. In response to Council questions, Ms. Braithwaite explained that by not mixing paper and cardboard, there is the flexibility to sell the paper.

Ms. Austin-Lane commented that she is satisfied that our collection of trash and leaves is the most cost effective for the City. She asked Ms. Braithwaite if we can improve the recycling practices in the City buildings. Montgomery County has educational materials that may be helpful.

Ms. Braithwaite indicated that she is in close contact with the County.

Mr. Lott described the stormwater projects proposed for FY06.

Mr. Khalilian explained the Spring Park stormwater project.

Mr. Williams commented that there is interest in the neighborhood in helping with the rain garden portion of the project. He requested that staff be sure to coordinate with the neighborhood.

Ms. Matthews summarized the Stormwater Fund. She noted that we will not have sufficient revenues under the current fee structure to make a dent in the projects that need to be done. We

will address this during next year's budget discussions.

Ms. Braithwaite described the progress on the street renovation project. She noted that the stormwater project list can grow whenever street work is being done and problems are noted. On street renovation, we are ahead of our projections on costs. We have made significant progress on the failed, very poor, poor and some of the fair streets. The street renovation project is chaotic by its nature. There can always be improvements in communication.

Council discussed the street renovation program.

Mr. Lott described his proposal to revise the distribution and disposal of the leaf mulch to free up staff time for other right-of-way work.

Council asked questions and discussed the leaf mulch program.

Mr. Lott and Ms. Braithwaite described plans for improving the communication with the current leaf vacuum system.

The Council discussed the leaf vacuum program.

Ms. Porter asked staff to research the TASDI Committee's recommendation to explore contracting road maintenance to the County.

Ms. Braithwaite reviewed the FY06-FY10 CIP.

Mr. Seamens requested that more detail be provided on the Police evidence bay during discussions of the Police budget.

Council questioned staff about items in the CIP.

Because of the lateness of the hour, the Community Center Fund and Debt Service discussions were delayed to a future meeting.

ADJOURN

Council adjourned for the evening at 10:48 p.m.